MR BILL WINTER (Self recorded). SOUTHWARK TRANS28.DOC

B: My name is Bill Winter. I live at 7 Salisbury Court, Webster Road, Bermondsey, SE16 4DH. Telephone number: 0171-237-7099.

At the outbreak of war I was nine years old. The family consisted of mum and dad, the elder brother and myself, younger brother and a younger sister. We lived in the ground floor flat on Bourbon Estate, number 85 in Spa Road. My dad was in the Civil Defence before the war. He was taken on in 1938. A month or so before the war, I remember he was a post warden serving in the Fort Road Institute. The family was issued with gas masks in '38. Our flat, my dad being a warden, became a fire precaution point and we had two sand buckets, two water buckets, a stirrup pump, hanging on the wall outside the front door. In the living room and the bedroom were sandbags up to six foot. The windows of all the flats in the estate were issued with anti-blast tape to be fixed diagonally across the panes of glass. Blackout material was used in our flat. We used it on a broomstick handle. You used to fold it up and down when it was in use. It was also used on the doors as well. We were on the ground floor.

On one occasion the blast of one bomb blew out the kitchen windows. Luckily everybody else was in the living room or the passage. We used to go down to the shelter in the Arches in Spa Road at the beginning of the war. We stopped going when it didn't appear that it was going to be worth it because the railways were being bombed. So rather than lose your life by trying to run away from the bombs my parents decided that it would be better for us to go and take a chance in our own flat because in actual fact, with the sandbags, we were on a corner, we had extra walls, one butting to the other - it stopped the damage being as bad as it could be.

About five weeks after we stopped going down to the shelter, several bombs exploded directly outside the arches in Spar Road. Luckily nobody was injured in the shelters. They did make a terrible mess of the houses that were outside and done blast damage to Pearce and Duffs which is (was?) on the corner of Royal (?) Road there.

When the raids were continuing every evening in 1940, 41, in the mornings after the all clear went, which was round about six o'clock, half past six, my younger brother and myself got permission from my mum - dad was still down, he used to go round the pubs, he used to be ..(?) about 18 hours a day. We used to go out and collect bomb and shell shrapnel from the streets. We used to collect it and put it in sandbags. Some fantastic shapes we found. Over the period of time we got a lot of incendiary bomb things, half burnt out incendiary bombs. We used cover them over with sandbags and stop the air getting to them and stop them burning.

One particular raid, it was a very bad one. It had hit the Salvation Army office. They had dropped a lot of what they termed Molotov Baskets - they were bombs containing incendiary bombs. They used to open up and then they spread. They were using a new version which was half incendiary and half explosive. The normal method of fighting incendiary bombs was to cover them with sandbags and stop the air supply. The person in charge of the Salvation Hospital, known as the Major, was placing sandbags over one of these bombs when it exploded and he was fatally injured. Dad used to say, it makes a difference when you're trying to put out a fire if you are going to get blown to pieces - so let it burn. After one particular raid - we were at that time between attending schools so we were able to go out collecting shrapnel before and after breakfast. Breakfast usually consisted of porridge and toast and a cup of tea. We went down to two bomb sites. The second one was in Balaclava Road which had been bombed in that particular raid. And at the Linden Road end of it, there were two shops side by side that had been blasted. They had all the front blasted out and they were open. Nobody was about so my brother and myself, two other friends went into a shoe repairers which was one of the shops and helped ourselves to some leather and rubber soles. And next door to the sweet shop, which was rows and rows of jars of sweets, so we helped ourselves to two jars each. We were going off down Linden Road going towards Dunn Road, just about to go through the flats of Longford Estate when there was a vioce behind shouting "Oi!". Turning round, there was a large policeman coming towards us. Off ran the two friends, dropping the jars as they went. My brother and I were collared and taken into Hammond Road (?) police

station with the policeman explaining that what we had been doing was looting and was very serious. It taught me a lesson anyway. I'll remember that for the rest of my life. After giving him details of who we were and where we lived I told him that our dad was a post warden at the post just round the corner. After speaking to the desk sergeant he told us to go with him. We were put in a detention cell until our dad came after about ten minutes or so. After we had promised that we would never do that again, we were told to get home. We promised to make sure that we were indoors when he came home at four o'clock that afternoon. I knew that would mean at least a strap if not more. However, mum knowing what dad could be like when he was upset, she made sure that we ran an errand and said "Don't hurry back". After I get back home at about a quarter to five, dad had gone back to the post....(?) a clip round the ear.

That particular police station was completely destroyed along with the bakery and the warden's post about three or four months after that episode. On that night we were indoors at 85 Bourbon Estate and we heard a land mine explode, amongst the other explosions. Dad was on duty. He had been in to check the shelters under Donaghue Estate which was opposite. He was going back to the post, he'd just stepped into Fort Road itself, out of the flats when a land mine exploded literally yards in front. He told us afterwards that there was a brilliant white flash and a noise and then the building in front of him just shook, jumped up and collapsed. The blast picked him up and threw him over the five foot railings and about forty foot into Donaghue Estate flats. He landed head first on an inspection drain. But for his steel helmet he would have been killed. He was at Guys Hospital and was sent to Coulsdon in Surrey to recuperate for six weeks with serious concussion. He was very fortunate that he didn't get killed in the explosion and fortunate that he didn't die when he hit the cover. my mum went round o the post the next day and was told that the post warden had been killed but she found out it wasn't dad. It was another chap. She got information that afternoon about him being sent to Coulsdon.

Some of the schools were closing down. At that time they closed down at the beginning of the war because the children had been sent off, evacuated. All four of us were attending St James school at the time of the outbreak of war. St James school was directly opposite the entrance to St James's church in Thurlow (?) Road. That school was closed and most of the pupils were evacuated at the beginning of the war. I and my brother went to Falcon Street for a few weeks, then they closed there. We went to Alexis Street for about six months then they closed that. Alexis Street School now they call it Elms School but it has still got the name Alexis Street over in the building itself. It was an LCC school. When Alexis Street closed we went to Bouncer (?) School for a few weeks and then we went to Elmer (?) School which was in Southwark Park Estate until I was evacuated at the end of May 1941.

The end of May 1941, the last big raid was the 30th May. Due to the fact that the Salvation Army had been hit - more than just bombs, incendiaries, everything was blazing about fifty or sixty foot flames going up. We had to get out of our flats because the Slavation Army was only about thirty foot away from it. We had to go in somebody else's flat. When we were running from between our flat, Fishlock flat, which is in the front of Bourbon Estate, it was another one that had sandbags all the way round it, mum fell over. It was just gravel in the square. Of course she was badly injured on her legs, arms, elbows, face, where she fell. That frightened the life out of her so she decided that we had been through enough then and we were going to be evacuated. If she had waited she would have known full well that that was the last raid, the last big raid. Three of the four children, we were evacuated. We went to Kettering in Northamptonshire. We went by black cab up to St Pancras. They had special carriages on the train. Teachers from other schools were in charge on the train and about fifty or sixty children out of a possible 120 were taken by coach from one particular school. There was another intake place. We were given a parcel by mum and dad and told that you had to take a case and a change of clothing and something to eat, sanwiches, a cold drink, chocolate. We took a change of underclothes, a shirt and socks. Foster parents came round to the school in the afternoon to select you. My brother and I were selected about half past three in the afternoon. My sister...(?) They came round and they took my sister to a different billet home. She went to another foster home about a mile or so from where we were going. We were next door to one another in the same road, Linden Avenue. I was the eldest and I was told to make sure that

weall went together. But that was not how it would be done. However I got the address for where my sister went to. I was billeted next door to my brother and I lived next door to him for about a year. We were looked after well but it was not quite the same as your own family. After one year I made the mistake of staying down the fair - there was a weekend fair they used to have there - till eleven o'clock at night. I was told I'd be sent back to the billeting authorities, but the father of the family, the Walters, he worked at the local gas works as a retort worker and he spoke to his manager and he told him that other than that mistake I was a reasonably good lad. I was taken up to his house, his mothers house, his wife and his mother in law, which was a beautiful house, detached. It backed onto the cemetry. I was brought up just like their own child. I had my own bedroom and I was with them for two and a quarter years. They bought me clothes as an addition to the ones that mum and dad bought. I was making sure that my sister was all right. She was only eight years old at the time. My brother was nine and a half. At the time I was ten, going on for eleven. I used to receive a parcel for my sister, my brother and myself every week from mum. It was all one big parcel with three little parcels inside. It used to contain a letter, some sweets, pocket money and biscuits. I used to go and make sure that they got their parcel every week. The local children took some time to accept the Londoners in with the games in the street. The best side of being there was the country. It was so easy to get to. We were accepted by the locals. We became reasonably good friends. One in particular, I became friendly with was Paul Hopley who lived in Chestnut Avenue which was the road off Linden Road. He and I went aircraft spotting, swimming. Although we went to different schools we used to meet and visit the local library and study the Illustrated News, Jane's All World Aircraft. There wasall the different types of aircraft. I kept in touch with these foster parents, Auntie Betty and Dick Maddox year by year for twenty years. From them I learned that Paul had joined the RAF and become a pilot. Last year on television they had a programme "This is yourr life" on a chief of staff, RAF. I saw Wing Commander Paul Hopley appear as a guest. It was the same fella. Mum used to visit every onth on a Sunday. I think it wa a cheap day ticket they used to be allowed to buy once a month. I saw my dad three times during that three and a quarter years. My elder brother never came. He stayed at home, looking after the flat and mum and dad were still there. He was eleven years old at the outbreak of war so he was a little bit more mature than what we were.

The games we played at that time - there were games such as release, tippy cat. That was a game similar to rounders but iinstead of being played with a bat and ball it was played with two pieces of wood. One large, one used as a bat to knock it off the edge of the kerb. You knocked it up in the air and hit it as you would do a ball, and they used to run round similar to rounders. And of course you had the rounders, with the bat and ball if you had one. Roller skates. Ball-bearing wheeled scooters. Soap box carts. "Release", which is a gang game with two sides. You picked out who wasin your side. There was boy and girl stuff, kiss chase. Then there was a piggy back game, horse and jockey, rove across the road (?). You had your horse and your jockey, usually the horse was the bigger fella and the jockey got on his back and then they had to go from different sides of the road. You picked out who you was going to go against, so it was one piggy back pair against another piggy back pair from the opposite team. The idea was to get across the road without being knocked off, touch your feet on the roadway. If you could get across without touching down then you got a mark up. Then there was "tip cat collar" (?). That was a game where you selected your team. The idea was to knock the tin out of its little box it was drawn up (?) with. Then you knocked the tin out and one half would go and hide and the other half had to find them.

Knock down ginger, marbles, five stones. Then there was another one called donkey which was another game with probably round about six or seven of you on each side. You played with one person acting, you stood with your back to the wall and you was a cushion and the others bent down, head into the stomach area and then sort of lined up, as you would do for leap frog, but head on. You just make a long row and the idea was the other team used to try and run behind your back and make you collapse..(?). Tennis balls. Football. another one was Hot Rods, which you played with a cricket bat and ball and your legs were the wicket and you had to face the person who had the ball and his idea was to hit you in the legs, down below your waist line and you use the bat to stop the ball from hitting you. When you had your legs caught by the ball, it was someone else's turn. There's not many kids in the flats had bikes in

those days. I can only remember one out of about fifty kids. Most of the kids in the flats used to wear plimsolls. There was no school ..(?) except for the local grammar school. About half the kids had been evacuated anyway.

A game that came about during the war was, due to they had made static water tanks made of steel. They had been erected in the grounds of the flats because there was problems when the water was cut off after the pipes had been damaged by bombing. To make sure they had water to hand they had built these particular type of tanks. They were about three foot six high, about eight foot wide by twenty four, twenty five foot long. Made of sections of steel bolted together. and they were supported across the top by straps about two and a hlaf inches by three eighths, bolted to the sides to stop them bulging out. And then they filled them up with water to about six inches from the top. What the kids used to do as a dare was ...(?), was walk around the ends and walk across the straps without falling off or falling in. There were a few of them falling in that thing. Of course when the water was still, stagnant, it used to silt up with the dust. Also there used to be a lot of algae on top. One of the things was to get a stick and stir it up and see how much mud you could collect. A bit unhealthy at the time, now when you think of it.

I came home from evacuation in 1944. I was 14 years old and in 1944 you started work when you was 14. The celebrations in 1945 for VE Day and VJ Day were - usually the street parties were held for the school children. As soon as you left school at 14, you didn't go to the street party. They didn't come in with the age limit going up from 14 to 15 which they did in 1945, and then it went up again afterwards up to 16, though they did have it up to 15 and if you wanted to stay at school for an extra year, you could. Basically it was because there were people coming home from the war and to make sure that there were more jobs available. With school kids taking them at 14, a lot of the members of the armed service came back out and found that the jobs had been taken by younger people. So with the street parties on VE DAy, it was up to the age of 14, they did hold street parties for the younger children up to about nine, and then they held another lot for the nine to fourteen lot. The parents, the families were giving up points, we were still on rations, for goods, or they used to have a little pool and people put in what they could afford - money, goods, whatever, to go towards the party which was held about three or four months after the end of war. Made a good sight to see them all sitting down the street, ...(?) the Dunlop place for the estate. I hope it never happens again.

END OF AUDIO TAPE SIDE A

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SIDE B

MR ELDEN - SOUTHWARK 21.3.95
Interviewer: Rib Davis

R: Mr Elden? Where were you at the beginning of the war?

E: I was at college during the war. And seeing films of the RAF. Errol Flynn was the most outstanding in my mind. Seeing the planes and what have you. It was very exciting. At the age of seventeen you are very impressionable and they had a recruitment drive at the time. All you had to do was go up to the labour office and tell them your age. You didn't have to take no birth certificate, just tell them your age and they sign you up, and the next thing you know, you was in camp. Well, I was very brave at the time going up there but when I realised that within a matter of three weeks I was in camp, and in another matter of three weeks I was being shipped out, that's when I really got scared.

R: How did your family feel about it?

E: They didn't want it, but once I'd done it there was nothing I could do.

R: You did it without telling them?

E: Yes. To start with I told my mum "I want to join the Royal Air Force". Now you see I could have joined the American, but she dissuaded me. She said "If the Americans wanted to take a place and it cost 500 men, they lose the 500 men to take the place". Although you don't get as much pay as the Americans, if the British want to take a place and it cost 500 men they'll try and find a way to use only four. So I joined up on that pretext, for 21 shillings a week and ten bob allowance for my mum. Anyway they shipped us out and we went to the States and then we all waited for a convoy to come here. That was the most horrifying trip, from New York to Glasgow. It was in a convoy and you get on deck and you look back and the U-Boat was picking off the last ship, the ship at the back. Now and again you'd see a bow go up in smoke and destroyers whooshing about the place. Anyway we landed in Glasgow and the reception there was great. There was people with cocoa, chocolate and what have you. People wanting to touch your hair for luck. Fantastic. Then they took us to a place called Hunmonday Moor in Filey that used to be Filey Holiday Camp. It was an RAF Camp then, during the war. I had never experienced snow and on Christmas Eve we went to bed and when we got up Christmas Day there was icicles on the roof, snow on the ground and a lot of the fellows hadn't seen it before. Ice is a very precious thing back home in the tropics so some of the guys started eating these icicles. In less than no time the whole flight was in trouble for the race to get to the loo because of the impurities in the icicles. Anyway when we went to bed after that it was six blankets fold envelope type and your greatcoat on top of that and there was an iron stove in the middle of the hut and we'd fill it up with coke and burn it until it got really red hot, it was going up the chimney, to keep the hut warm.

Then they posted us from Filey to Yatesbury in Wiltshire and we waitedon that station for a train for six hours. The train was snowbound and we froze. We really froze. We got on the train and we came down, Kings Cross, and switch over to another train, Paddington to go to Yatesbury. You had trade tests before you got posted out and you had groups. Group one to five jobs. I was on a radar wireless course at Yatesbury. We did a course there, six weeks at Yatesbury and then we went over to Compton Bassett which wasn't far. Then I switched to air traffic control. Now I had wanted to fly. When I came here and I see how far up they go I says "No". Terra firma! On the ground. All the ...(?) talking about their ..(?), there are some cowards in them and I was one. I said "No. I'm not going up there for them to shoot me down". Anyway I went to the air traffic control and I did air traffic control right the way through till the war was finished and I signed on for three years and I stayed in and then I got married and come out.

R: Why did you stay on for another three years?

E: Because at that ttime I was worried about leaving home as a boy and going back as a man, because people you leave still think of you the way you were. I had something to prove and it wasn't proven yet, if you understand what I mean. So I didn't want to go back. With the Ministry of Labour I did scientific glass blowing and glass technology. We used to make all the laboratory equipment for hospitals, spiral condensers and things like that. Then I went to J Arthur Rank at Crystal Palace and did glass blowing there for a while, got on very well with that.

THen I decided to go in the post office. I left a £12 a week job to go and do a £6 a week job. The reason being that you get plenty of overtime, so that £12 a week would become £20 a week.

R: At air traffic control, what exactly were you doing?

E: Just like they do at Heathrow. They give the aircraft permission to land and anything they ask for, a weather report, anything like that. I wantedto do it in Jamaica but they applied, they had an advert in the sergeant's mess for air traffic controllers in Jamaica. So I went on forces leave to Jamaica and I applied there. But it was Pan Am that was in charge, American, and

there wasn't one black person in the air traffic control. So when I applied to them they said thatthe vacancy was filled. So I came back to England after my leave was finished and they were still applying for air traffic controllers. That's when I burnt my boats. I said "If that's my country and I'm qualified for the job and can't get it, I don't want to know". So I burnt my boats from as early as that.

R: Did you come across any similar treatment to that here? On account of you being black?

E: Yes, there is always that everywhere you go. In the early days you would never find a black man driving a bus. You wouldn't. No. No.

R: You mean they would only be conductors?

E: No. They wouldn't employ a black man on the buses. But there came a time when there was a lack of labour and Enoch Powell sent to Barbados. He went to all the islands and then he said theBarbadians are the most educated and he brought them over from Barbados to go directly on the buses. And they even provide them with accommodation through the government. That's how this started on a large scale. That is when the influx really started, in the fifties.

R: At the end of the war, what were your feeling about the election at the end of the war?

E: The feelings was all Labour. There was hardly anybody could see anything besides Labour. Mind you, Labour had a lot of good politicians. My own feelings was that I never believe in party politics. I believe there should be a coalition because I feel that the best foreign minister should get the job. At that time it was Anthony Eden andI don't think Labour had a man to combat him. Therefore I was disappointed really because I felt that if a coalition government could get them through the war, a coalition government could get them throught the peace and I didn't like the way things were swinging, just like I do now. I don't think any party that gets in now can salvage anything from what's gone wrong. When Labour was ousted the balance of payments was level and now look at it, it's gone. I'm not blaming anybody in particular because you can't talk unless you know enough but I do think that the old and the poor people have suffered.

R: In 45, what were the reasons for almost everyone being pro-Labour?

E: The reasons for that were simply this - that we had a few people who thought that the Tories must get in because they had the money and if you don't have the money you can'tget in, so didn't want to vote Labour. But the consensus of opinions was that with the unions and what have you, we will demand and we will get. Well, they took it too far in the end because I remember when the unions were rife, we used to have shop stewards who used to come around - I was at the post office - and if you were sorting too fast, tap you on the shoulder and say to you "You're supposed to sort a parcel in so many seconds". I used to pick up a parcel and one in this hand and throw either side and get it over with quick to go home. But no. The union shop stewards used to stop you from doing that. And there wa a lot of waste during that time, perishable goods andthings like that. People was in no hurry to do it. So I stuck to that for quite a while and then I got promoted to postman, higher grade.

R: Where were you living when you were an air traffic controller?

E: Carshalton. I got married and lived in Carshalton. I was married for two weeks and they decided to post me to Singapore. I only had just under six months to do. There was an Air MO, which was an Air Ministry Order.

R: Was this after the war?

E: Yes. Of course in the Far East they were still fighting. There was an Air Ministry Order that said if you have six months or lessto do, you shouldn't be posted overseas. Bu my air traffic

controller thought that because I wasin line for a commission, that I couldn't refuse a commission - This little boy coming form nowhere, how can he refuse a commission? So I went along with him for a while and then when it was just time for them to post me out, I went to the Air Ministry. Wrote a letter to the Air Ministry and pointed out to them I had less than six months to do and I shouldn't be on a draft, so they took me off and I took my demob.

R: Was that the attitude, that the boys can go away (?)

E: There was a lot of that at the time, a lot of that. You've got to realise that these peole hadn't mixed much and the scene at the time was that your house was in a tree or something like that. I remember going to take a photograph to send home in Holmonday Moor, and four of us entered this photographers. The bell rang as you opened the door. A woman came down the stairs and she came from behind the curtains and she saw the four of us. And she bolted. Whoosh! Right back inside. We waited and then a man came down and he peeked from behind the curtain. Then eventually he came out "Can I help you?" We said "Yes. We want to take some photographs to send back home". So he came and he done it. But, they hadn't seen many black people before.

R: Was it just fear? He was just scared?

E: Scared! Scared! Scared! I remember I played very big cricket. We went to Bath to play a cricket match and my wing commander, he liked me because he knew there was runs on the board. Anyway, I was sitting with his son and his son was a keen cricketer and I used to coach him. I was waiting to go in to bat and he said to me "Alex, I'm going to ask you something and you must tell me if it's true or not". So I said "Well, ask me". He says "Mummy said,". Now she wasn't far from us. ""God made the little nigger boy. He made them in the night. He made them in a hurry and forget to paint him white." Is that true?". I said "No. It's only a saying". She was so embarassed. She went as red as a beet. "Tommy," she said. "How dare you! That was a joke." Anyway, the wing commander was very very good because of playing cricket. He liked me very much. This Tommy, he would come over to me and ask to be coached and what have you, which I did and that was all right. But we had plenty things that showed you that people hadn't mixed. All the people in the East End of London because the ships at the docks, KG5 and that, black people came in on the ships and they went in the pubs and there was plenty of drink about and what have you, so Cable Street and that area, they were all right. They were accustomed to black people. But not many places.

The thing that frightened me most was when they had the doodle bombs. We came on leave and we went to the Strand YMCA and that was about six stories up. I had met a Canadian guy who had gone all the way through Africa right up to Italy. This guy wa about six four, big fella. This fella had gone through hell and he feared nothing. I was glad to spar with him, go around with him because he was a tremendous guy and I know that I am safe with him. We were sleeping in the same dormitory and the air raid siren went. These are the doodle bugs. I jumped up. It woke me and I jumped up to put on my greatcoat to go down in the shelter. He took this great paw and grabbed me. He says "Get in your bed. When Gabriel wants you he'll blow his horn and you've got to go". And he never moved, and I had to pass him to get out so I couldn't get out. So I'm lying there with my teeth chattering, chattering until the all clear came, and I said "Never again. I'm not staying with you no more. No, no, no." The man was fearless. He had seen that. I hadn't seen that sort of thing. Like I said, I was very lucky because they mobilised us to go into Germany when Ronstead broke through in the latter part of the war and they were going to turn RAF regiments into soldiers and send them over there to stop the gap and then it would be the Air Force after that. But luckily it didn't come to that so I was really glad. These doodle bombs, they frightened me like hell. It's when you didn't hear them, that's it.

When we were on Honmonney Moor in Filey, we used to see them coming over but they were geared to drop further in, just passing over us. Hull got quite a few. It was scary but not as scary as it could have been if you were unlucky.

R: What brought you to live in Southwark in the end?

E: The school. The South London Greenband (?) School, training taxi drivers.

R: But this isn't in Southwark, here, is it?

E: No. But what I am saying is I applied to Lambeth and I got the grant through Lambeth. It was mostly for the unemployed. I got the grant through Lambeth and it just continued because it is creating employment.

R: What attracted you to live in Southwark as opposed to living here?

E: It's just the fact that I was living in Southwark when I got the grant and I just come to England.

R: What took you there to start with?

E: Where, Southwark? Well, I got married a second time. I used to live in Carshalton. That's where my first family is. When I got married again I ended up in Southweark so I didn't move and it didn't bother me, so I just stayed there. The School is more or less the second stage of my life because at the end of 1956 I became a cab driver, a London taxi driver and I remain so till now.

R: Was there a black community that you felt part of in the war years?

E: No. No. There wasn't. But eventually we formed cricket clubs and things like that. We were spread out all over the place. Eventually we formed cricket clubs and we used to come down weekends and play cricket at Harrods and places like that.

R: At the start, you must have been quite isolated.

E: Yes you felt isolated but you knew that life had to go on. The Londoner is a different entity to the Yorkshire blokes, Hampshire blokes, all over the country. A londoner is different because, well, city people are always different. They don't take so long to know you and to fraternise. But in the country you have little pockets and during the war they will entertain you because there's a means to an end - they used to have this feeling that you were lucky going there, as a black man. If I went into a pub up North, people would buy me a drink just to touch my hair. Tha's luck, so they say. Oh yes. They'd buy me a drink and touch my hair for luck. Funny!. But they were all right once they got to know you.

R: But would they ever really get to know you?

E: That's true. One thing that changed all of that is the younger generation. Both boys and girls. They wanted to mix. For instance, we used to go to dances and the fact that we could jive - the girls were round you, wanted to learn to jive.

R: Would the boys be resentful of that?

E: Oh yes they were. They used to wait for you outside to beat you up (?). I went to Suckhall Street in Glasgow one night and it was Greens Playhouse and we went in there and we started jiving and the girls came over and they wanted to dance and of course the boys resented that. So they decided to go outside and wait for us. When we got outside we had about 300 yards to go to get to the YMCA.

R: Who was the "we"?

E: Me and about six other guys.

R: Were they all black?

E: Yes. All black. A group of about twelve of them was waiting about a hundred yards from the Playhouse. I know they was tooled up because the girls told us thatthey'd be after us. You talk about sprinting! When we hit the door, it was every man for himself. Luckily we got away, and we never did that no more. When we go in the dance hall, we don't dance, don't dance with the girls because of that. We knew what was coming. It waslike that all the way over. When we went to Nuneaton there were Yanks there. That was worse. They couldn't understand the fraternising, black and white. When they come in the dance, they definitely come in the dance for war - We shouldn't be in the dance. But we got down there in numbers and we fight like hell! Yes, it was dead funny!

R: So at that point the Americans were more segregated than the English?

E: Oh yes. They were always more segregated. I go to New York now and the segregation is even more because black people, West Indians, Trinidadians mostly stick with Trinidadians. Jamaicans mostly stick by themselves in New York. Italians stick by themselves. That really surprised me.

R: More even than here?

E: Oh yes. They are well segregated there. I can go down to Earls Court now and I am quite comfortable because it is a cosmopolitan area. I could go in any club and I am all right. But not so in New York.

R: And you felt that strongly with the American soldiers?

E: Oh yes. They didn't mince their words. You knew where you stood with them.

R: Did you talk to any of the black American soldiers?

E: Yes. Yes. We became friends because they realised that we are on the same side and we'd really got to fight this one out, and they joined us in all the battles and it carried on. They joined us in all the battles. But you know a funny thing - I was guarding some Italians in Cranwell, Lincolnshire. Now these Italians were prisoners of war. They wore a green uniform. They were working in the fields with the Land Army girls and we were guarding them. Now, the funny thing is, you couldn't walk out with a WAF or a Land Army girl because her life would be hell, yet these Italians who were supposed to be prisoners of war, were fraternising openly. I thought this was funny.

There was one German man, Hans, one day he said to me "Alec". I'm standing with the rifle. He's having a drink, sitting down in the field.

R: Was he a prisoner of war?

E: Yes. He says "Have you ever thought what will happen when this war is over?" So I says "No. I suppose I'll go home. How about you?" He says - he's a cousin of the Messerschmidt family - "After the war I'll be at the Savoy. Where will you be?" That gave me food for thought. Later on, after I came out of the RAF and I became a cab driver, every time I picked up a German and took him to the Savoy I wondered if it was Hans. The man is so right! These changes I can't understand because as a little guy going to college, France was the best friend of Britain. I can't see it now. It's Germany and France against Britain. Where is the equation?

R: When you joined up, did you feel it was your war, that Britain was in any way the mother country?

E: Yes. Oh yes. We had plenty of that. Britain was the mother country as far as we are concerned and you've gotto fight for king and country. You understand, that was embedded in you from a kid in school. Land of Hope and Glory and what have you. And I received a hell of a shock when I saw Buckingham Palace. I was expecting gold. I had a hell of a shock. I couldn't believe it. It certainly deflated me.

R: How did you feel when you were being treated in this way - They didn't mind you dying for Britain as long as you didn't go after the girls.

E: Yes I felt resentment. But what can you do - You were in, you can't come out. And its a long way to walk 5000 miles so you just make the best of it. And then later on, being in London, people were more understanding and I met my wife and her parents received me very well. So it's not everybody.

R: Is she white?

E: Yes. They received me very well. That is the difference. We had three children. They grew up and what have you. We broke up and I moved away from Carshalton. My biggest boy is a cab driver too. The biggest girl she works at Chase Manhatten. The other has her own business. Then I had two more boys. One of them is with me now training to be a cab driver. The other one is in computers down by Saville Row. So I've done the full lot and it doesn't matter. I'm just relaxing now, coasting.

R: When you first came did you think you were going to stay?

E: No. I used to play very good cricket and my sights were set in getting in the West Indies team. But when I stayed here and the WestIndies reached the height, the peak, Irealised I wouldn't get in the team. THe bubble burst. So I just played club cricket and a few games for Surrey Seconds because I couldn't play for a county. You'd have to have the qualification period. So I realised that that one had gone by. Hope and ambition just go by the side and you just readjust and carry on. But I know one thing - I've never been out of work from the day I stepped into this country.

R: Have you come to think of yourself as British or not?

E: We were always taught that we were British. Always. In those days Jamaica had no independence. By the time they got their independence I took out a British passport. My family is here and everything like that, therefore I just have to conform. Most of the ex-servicemen at the club they view it that way too. It's amazing that the children are different. They're definitely English. And I believe that until this government or any future government start believing that, we'll still have bothers. Because how can you say that they are not? There is such a thing as a black Englishman. But would they say that? No. They say "He's from West Indian parentage." Not unless he won a world title. Or he's a Linford Christie! Then they turn it round the other way.

That's why in a way I like America, for that reason - not to live there - You are American. Finish. And France.

R: They do have the phrase "American Italian" now. Or American whatever" or Afro Caribbean".

E: They say that but it doesn't carry no weight. They're American straight off. My best years in this country is working as a cab driver for 39 years.

R: Some people say that the moood in this country changed immediately after the war. Did you feel that?

E: It did. The mood of the country really changed. In the way that "The danger's gone, back out. Back out!"

R: Towards you, you mean?

E: Yes. Towards me. Everybody who was left behind and they feel that you've taken something that they feel they should have had. But the snag about it is that they couldn't manage it because there wasn't a labour force to manage it. These union shop stewards were the worst thing that ever happened in this country. They got ahead of themselves.

R: This "Back out" - Were you expecting that change of attitude by the end of the war?

E: Yes. Well, I couldn't forsee it but the minute it happened I could see their point. The only thing I couldn't see is, if you've got roots here, why should you dig them up. I mean, kids were born here. Where my children are, that's where I should be. Right now I've got six grandchildren and five children. What am I running to Jamaica for? I'll go to Jamaica on holiday. But if push come to shove I'll fight to stay right here and that's it. I think people recognise this in most cases and they leave you alone. You are left alone. But as I said, until the government realises there is such a thing as a black Englishman, you're going to have trouble because - look at them, that's my second to last son. Look at his skin. Inside two stages it's gone. When that kid grew up, you can't tell him he's black. He don't want to know.

R: But it doesn't matter whether he's white or black...

E: No but what I'm saying is he can disguise. I can't hide. And my first girl. Her children - she married a guy from Newcastle. Her children is white but my son, his kids are like Syrians. What I'm saying is that time moves on. Now that there is such a mix up, when they go to school and you touch him, his cousin is going to come for you and his brother is going to come for you, which we didn't have - We didn't have that inside protection. Now its all mixed up. What can you do with it, just the same as in Jamaica when the Chinese got there until eventually they got accustomed to the place, they opened their business and what have you and everybody live happily ever after because they were hard workers.

END OF AUDIO TAP, SIBE B INTERVIEW

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